



St. Joseph River conservation project

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ST. JOSEPH COUNTY, Ind. - A press conference was held at Pier 33 Marina in St. Joseph on Monday to discuss the latest developments in the St. Joseph Watershed Initiative.

U.S. Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Gary Peters (D-MI), and Joe Donnelly (D-IN) highlighted the \$13.6 million investment to improve the water quality in the St. Joseph Watershed.

More than 70-percent of the St. Joseph River is used for agricultural purposes, which stretches through Michigan and Indiana and covers 15 counties before emptying into Lake Michigan in St. Joseph.

Support for the plan comes from the Regional Conservation Partnership Program which was created by Stabenow's 2014 Farm Bill.

"This is about saving money on dredging, increasing water quality, and also in the long term we want to make sure that we keep things as clean as possible," Stabenow said.

The partnership includes farmers, businesses, and lawmakers alike to help improve the overall quality of this watershed, which is the third-largest river basin of Lake Michigan.

General Manager of Pier 33 Marina Tighe Curran says sediment build-up is a big problem for his business.

"Over the years as sediment builds up in the St. Joseph River, businesses like ours are forced to dredge to get the right depths we need for boats to navigate," said Curran.

The St. Joseph Watershed Conservation Partnership plans to help farmers access conservation tools that improve productivity in the field and reduce excessive sediment and nutrients in the St. Joseph River.

Local farmer with Heritage Family Farms Brett Totzke says they already work hard to minimize runoffs and sediment deposits into the river.

"I can't say exactly how it will effect us until we get into it but I do know that no farmer wants any of their soil, top soil, fertilizer, or chemicals to run in the ditch. We still drink the same water that everyone else does," Totzke said.

The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will partner with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and over 30 local organizations on the project.

Partners are required to match federal funding, effectively doubling the federal investment.